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ABSTRACT

To gauge the impact of after-school student detention on punctual completion of homework, on detained student grades, and on student self-esteem, fourth- through sixth-grade students from a school with an after-school detention policy for late or incomplete assignments were studied. Interviews were conducted with the four fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade teachers; with both detained students and students who had not been detained for late assignments; and with the parents of detained and nondetained students. In addition, the teachers were given a chart to log student detention and grade point averages for 2 weeks in October 1988. Students who were detained within that period completed a questionnaire at the conclusion of their detention. Results indicate that while the teachers were interested in helping students with assignments, they were frustrated with using their personal lunch or after-school work time to stay with students who behaved irresponsibly. The number of student detentions was found not to decrease unless: (1) parents had set guidelines and consequences for their children concerning late assignments; and (2) teachers personally contacted parents. Detainment alone did not prove to be an effective deterrent for late assignments. (KM)

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Detention as a Deterrent for Late Assignments
A Study

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Detention as a Deterrent for Late Assignments

INTRODUCTION

Getting students to return assignments completed and in on time is something teachers deal with on a daily basis. One way that teachers encourage students to return assignments completed and on time is investigated in this study.

Nineteen seventy-five was a year of change within the structure and staff of the school district studied. Staff cuts, mandated by the State, reduced the teachers in the District by five. This found specialized programs being cut and teachers being shuffled, especially from the tenured position in the high school, to the fourth through sixth grade elementary wing. It was also at this time of reassignment that the unwritten policy of after-school detention for late assignments came into effect in the fourth and fifth grades. This policy was extended to the sixth grade in 1987 with the addition of a new sixth-grade teacher.

The after-school detention for late or incomplete assignments has been in effect for nine years. The main object of this investigation is to discover the impact of after-school detention on completing assignments on time, on detained student grades, and student self-esteem. The study will seek to determine if some students are more apt to be late with assignments, or incomplete work than others. This study will also question the impact of this unwritten policy on teachers, parents, non-detained and detained students.

This study will be divided into four sections. The first will describe the methods used for gathering data. The second section will summarize the data gathered. The third section will analyze the data, and the fourth will present conclusions and recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

Data were obtained for the study in four ways. One involved the fourth- through sixth-grade teachers logging student detentions. A second involved interviews with the fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade teachers, students (detained and non-detained), and parents of detained and non-detained students. A third involved questionnaires that were completed by detained students. And, the fourth involved collecting grade point averages for detained students and fourth through sixth-grade classes.

Teachers in grades four through six were given a chart to log student detentions for a two week period, beginning October 10, 1988, and ending October 28, 1988. (See Figure I) The information requested names, grade level, sex and included columns for grade point averages for October 13 and November 2, 1988, grading periods. A section of the log provided space for indicating students who were enrolled in special programs. The investigator used progress slips, provided by the teacher and student files, to obtain grade point averages for 1987-1988 and first quarter grades, November 1988.

FIGURE I

TEACHER LOG FOR STUDENT DETAINMENTS

Teacher _____

Grade _____

STUDENT NAME	Date of Detainment	Oct. 12 GPA	Nov. 2 GPA	Spec. Prog.

FIGURE II

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Date _____ Name _____

Grade _____

What I learned from staying after school. _____

How did it make you feel? _____

Why was your assignment late? _____

Do you think you'll have late assignments again? _____

When I stay after school my parents and I (check one) ALWAYS ☐ SELDOM ☐ NEVER ☐ talk about the reason.

Students, who were detained, were asked to complete a questionnaire (Figure II) at the end of the time they were detained. The first four questions required a short written answer. The fifth statement asked that the student check the most appropriate answer.

The four teachers, who taught grades four, five and six, were interviewed and recorded by the interviewer. They were asked what was meant by a "complete assignment" or under what conditions an assignment is considered to be complete. They were also questioned about enforcement of after-school detention, grade penalties, effectiveness of after-school detention for completing assignments, other methods used to encourage completed assignments, and how detention effected them personally.

A sample of students, who had been detained two or more times, were also interviewed. They were asked about their response to "how did it make you feel," on the questionnaire. The interviewer needed an explanation given in the student's own words. The question was also raised about 1) parental response to the student staying after school for late assignments, 2) if the student voluntarily informed their parents about late assignments and detention, and 3) to the student who responded that their parents either said nothing or only talked to them about after school detention; "What would you do about late papers, if both of your parents agreed that some privilege, like being grounded or not be allowed to have friends over would be imposed?"

From the list of detained students, parents were contacted by telephone and interviewed concerning their thoughts on after school detention for late or incomplete assignments, their child's feelings, how effective they felt the policy was for deterring late assignments, if they followed up with some type of action at home, and did their child voluntarily share that they had been detained after school.

Three students from each fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade class, who had never been detained for late or incomplete assignments were also interviewed. They were asked what they thought their parents' reactions would be if they had to be detained after school for a late assignment, had the issue of after school detention and possible punishments for that behavior been discussed at home and the action that would be taken at home for that type of behavior.

DATA SUMMARY

The four teachers; one fourth-grade teacher, one fifth- and two sixth-grade teachers (a half-day morning teacher and a half-day afternoon teacher), were in agreement about their definition of a late or incomplete assignment. (This does not include assignments late because of an absence. There is a written school policy that deals with this.) Assignments were considered late if they did not meet the following criteria: 1) all the answers were not completed and with accuracy, 2) sloppy work, 3) some of the problems were skipped (unless the student had not understood the problem) and 4) the student did not have an assignment to turn in.

Assignments in grades four and five, that were incomplete were given credit for the work done and the paper were returned to be completed or corrected and was due the next school morning. Grading varied on the papers. In the fifth grade a "zero" was recorded if the student had no assignment. In the fourth grade, the assignment was to be returned the next day, and the score was reduced by 10 percent.

Assignments in the sixth grade that were incomplete were also returned to be completed and were due the next school day along with any assignment that had not been completed. The morning sixth-grade teacher reduced the grade by ten percent for each day the work was late. The afternoon sixth-grade teacher did not penalize students' grades for late work.

All four teachers used some type of detainment for late or incomplete assignments. The fourth-grade teacher, because she coached after school, detained the students for fifteen minutes during lunch recess. The fifth-grade teacher gave the students a note the day their assignment was late to deliver to their parents that evening, in order that arrangements could be made to stay after school the following day. The sixth-grade teachers expected the students to notify their parents by phone and stay after school the day the assignment was due. The students were detained for fifteen minutes if the assignment was completed by the end of the day, or thirty minutes if it was not. The afternoon sixth-grade teacher doubled the students time if they did not stay the night that the paper was due.

The teachers did have some concerns about after school versus lunch detention as a deterrent to late assignments. The fourth- and fifth-grade teachers are coaches and have after school commitments. The fourth-grade teacher used lunch detention until after the coaching season. However, she felt lunch detention could be more reinforcing than a punishment because of the other student activity in the room. The fifth-grade teacher used an aide to monitor students detained after school. Although he felt it was not ideal, he questioned giving up his own lunch time to "sit with students." The morning sixth-grade teacher was not present in the afternoon, as a result the afternoon teacher was left with the responsibility of overseeing detained students. As the school principal, he was often called out of the room at this time to handle administrative duties.

Giving up lunch or after school time to remain with detained students was often considered a "pain," by the teachers. However, if the parents supported the after-school detention for their children and it acted as a deterrent for late assignments, then the teachers felt the effort was well worth the time spent. The fifth-grade teacher was concerned with the parent who never responded, or "the parents who don't care or follow-up on where their child is after school. Sometimes you wonder who is being punished for late assignments, the teacher or the student."

The teachers were also questioned about any other methods they used to encourage students to complete assignments on time. The fourth-grade teacher contacted the parents by phone, the student who had late or incomplete work, and requested a conference with the parents. At the conference, the teacher laid out the problem and recommended a solution to the parents. The teacher would send home a nightly note with the student. The subjects would be listed, initialed if the work was complete, assignments written down, if they were not. The parent was to expect the note home every night, no exceptions. It was the parents' responsibility to see that the child also had the assignments the teacher had given them to work on. The parent and the child were to set goals. An example of these goals might be: after you have brought home five notes and assignments in a row, you may have a friend spend the evening or you and I will go get a milkshake. If you forget to bring your note and assignments home, you will lose TV privileges for two nights. As the student became more responsible the goals were changed. When the teacher caught the child being responsible, doing good work, they were sent to the principal's office for positive reinforcement.

The sixth-grade teachers also used this method, but not as consistently or promptly as the fourth-grade teacher. The afternoon teacher liked to confront the parents at conferences after the first quarter. The morning teacher contacted parents by phone after the third after-school detention.

The fifth-grade teacher did not make personal parent contact, continued sending home notes ("sometimes fifty per student") with his students. During conferences, neither the teacher or the parents brought up the subject of student detentions.

According to Figure III, thirty-four students were detained in grades four through six during the two week time period that this study took place. Fifteen of these students were females and nineteen were males. Of the total detentions, males were detained fifty-eight times compared to twenty-four times for the females. (See Figure IV.)

FIGURE III
STUDENT DETENTION BY SEX

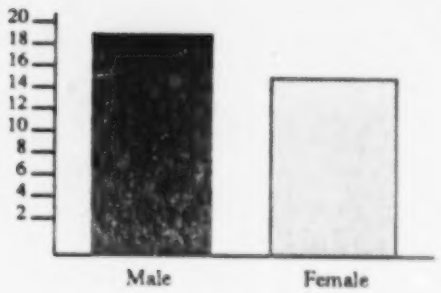

FIGURE IV
TOTAL STUDENT DETENTION BY SEX

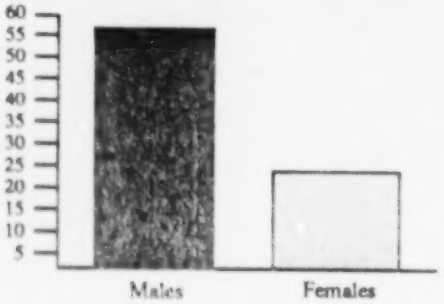

FIGURE V

COMPARISON OF DETAINED STUDENTS BY SEX
AND GRADE LEVEL

GRADE LEVEL	Males	No. Det.	Avg. Det.	Females	No. Det.	Ave. Det.
Fourth	1	1	1.0	3	3	1.0
Fifth	10	36	3.6	7	11	1.57
Sixth	8	21	2.6	5	10	2.00
TOTAL	19	58	3.0	15	24	1.60

Ratio Males to Females Detained 1.2:1

Ratio Males to Females
Total Times Detained 1 9:1

Comparing students by sex and grade and grade level (See Figure V) boys were detained thirty-six times in the fifth grade, twenty-one times in the sixth grade, and once in the fourth grade. There were three overall detentions for girls in the fourth grade, eleven in the fifth and ten in the sixth grade. The ratio of males to females detained was 1.2:1. The total number of detentions between males and females occurred 1.9:1.

According to Figure VI, 46 percent of the total males in the study were never detained, 11 percent were detained once, 14 percent were detained two times and 29 percent were detained three or more times. Compared to the males, 62 percent of the females had never been detained, 26 percent had been detained once, 9 percent two times and 3 percent were detained three or more times for incomplete or late assignments.

In Figure VII, grade point averages were compared to the number of detentions by grade level. Results show that there is an inverse relationship between higher GPAs and detentions in grades five and six.

The student surveys were divided into three areas. The first area was supposed to indicate the student's self-esteem and how it made them feel about staying after school. Of the 55 percent returned surveys, the students replied with words like: "mad," "sad," and "not good." Upon interviewing these students who had written these comments, it did not take long to find the meaning to these expressions. They simply meant "trouble." The definition of "trouble" depended upon the parental response to their child being detained for late assignments. "Trouble" was equivalent to punishment, restrictions at home, no television privileges, being grounded, no dessert, and no friends over after school. However, to the child, who was detained three or more times, "trouble" meant, "being yelled at" or "talked to" or "That's what the other kids wrote on the question so I put it down too."

The fifth question, on the survey, indicated how often the student told their parents about being detained for late assignments. The accuracy of this was questionable. The same student detained more than once might have indicted all three choices: always, seldom, or never, at different times.

The third question asked: "Do you think you'll have late assignments again?" It was like a self-fulling prophecy. Thirty-six percent of the females, who said they "probably would" or "yes," did have late assignments again. Of the males, who answered "yes" or "probably," 72 percent of them were detained again for late or incomplete work. None of the students indicated that they did not understand the assignment as a reason for staying after, but that they did not do the work or used their time "badly."

Students were divided into three groups for interviews. The first group had never been detained. They answered with a surprised look and "I wouldn't" when asked why they never had incomplete assignments. That was followed with my parents would "be mad" or "ground me." The second group of students, who had been detained one time, said their parents took privileges away, had to walk home (they were bus riders) after detention, or would be "grounded" if it happened again. "Grounded" included no friends over after school, not going to Seahawks games, no television or "fun" things. The third group had been detained more than once. They said their parents either "talked to them about staying after" or "yelled at them," but no further punishment was given or threats were made but not carried out. One child explained, "Dad yells at me, but only if he's already mad about something. He might take TV away, but that's okay, 'cause I only like the animal shows on Sunday." When this group was asked what they would do if both of their parents agreed that they would not let them (their child) have friends over for a week, or be grounded for late assignments, their answer with few exceptions was, "Get my work done."

Parents, who had children either detained or not detained, were all aware of the detainment policy, either through teacher, student or community contact. No one interviewed was opposed to the

FIGURE VI

NUMBER OF STUDENT DETENTION COMPARED TO TOTAL CLASS SIZE BY SEX GIVEN IN PERCENTAGES)

Grade Level	Class Size (M)	% Number of Det.				Class Size (F)	% Number of Det.			
		0	1	2	3+		0	1	2	3
Fourth	10	90	10	-	-	11	73	30	-	-
Fifth	16	38	13	13	38	15	53	33	7	7
Sixth	9	10	10	33	44	8	38	25	25	13
Total 4-6	35	46	11	14	29	34	62	26	9	3

FIGURE VII

COMPARISON OF GRADE POINT AVERAGES FOR STUDENTS
BY NUMBER OF DETENTIONS

GRADE LEVEL	CLASS SIZE	0	1	2	3+
Fourth	21	2.67	3.01		
Fifth	31	3.36	2.36	2.01	1.58
Sixth	17	3.86	3.47	2.44	2.69

unwritten policy. As to their opinion regarding the effectiveness, there were mixed responses. Some felt it acted as a deterrent, others saw it as necessary for students to be aware of their responsibilities, justified but not effective ("My son is lazy, puts everything off no matter what the consequences.) and some saw it as a deterrent if the child was in sports and had to run laps if he was late for practice.

Some parents were unaware that their students were being detained for late assignments. The reasons varied from: "not being home until late" because the parent worked, "no telephone," "sports after school" or their child "did not inform them."

When parents were asked, "What is done as a follow-up at home to late assignments?", the answers included: "nothing," "talk but no punishment," "privileges taken away," etc.

Only those students who had been detained one time were consistent in telling their parents about late assignments. These parents were also consistent with following up with promised punishments for late assignments.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The teachers were all interested in helping students with assignments and working with students with learning difficulties. However, the frustration of using their personal lunch time or after school work time to stay with students who "don't use their time properly" was emphasized. Their concerns about parental involvement and follow-up time to see that parents were checking their children's progress, also surfaced. However, it seemed that the parent support and the hope of deterring students from having late assignments was enough to keep the teachers from dropping detainment.

The manner in which the four teachers handled instigating parent involvement in making students accountable for school work, teaching parents how to work with the teacher and student, seems to explain the few detentions for late assignments in the fourth grade and the greater and consistent number of detention in the fifth grade. It appears that these teachers missed the boat way back in September for helping deter students from having late assignments.

One must wonder why males were so prone to having late assignments and why after school detention did not deter them from continuing this practice. Do males care less about grades, use their time less wisely than girls at their age, or is that behavior more acceptable among parents of boys? This study does not answer these questions, but it would be important to know if the teachers could use the answers to reduce the number of late assignments.

Grade point averages fell as detentions increased. This is reasonable because the teachers, with the exception of the part-time afternoon sixth-grade teacher, reduced grades or gave "zeros" for late work. The students' grades would reflect this. The teacher log, however, indicated that four of the students detained are involved in the school's highly capable program, hence ability must not be the only factor reflected in the low grade point averages.

The roll of parental reaction to the child's late work and consistent punishment or rewards affected the child's willingness or lack of concern for completing assignments on time. On the other hand, the students picked up on what would or would not happen to them as a result of after school detention. If the parent found something that was really important to the student, a privilege they did not want to give up, the student tended to complete assignments on time. The students admitted that they would complete assignments on time to the interviewer, if both parents agreed to take away the child's free or personal time at home, "they would get their work done." Parents failed to realize that they could have an important influence on their children.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

Webster's Dictionary defines deterrent as "serving to discourage, or prevent from happening." Therefore for detention to be a deterrent to late assignments, the number of after school detentions should have decreased. This was not the case unless: 1) parents had set guidelines and consequences for their children concerning late assignments, 2) teachers contacted parents personally, and 3) the teacher provided some parent training for working with their child and the teacher and setting up goals and consequences for late and on-time assignments. Detainment alone was not effective as a deterrent for late assignments.

Conover's recommendation would be that all the teachers employ the fourth grade teacher's program for working with parents consistently and as soon as the student has late assignments. Data should be recorded and examined to see if this conclusion is accurate.